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6/7/01

**STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION RELEASES
HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAMINATION RESULTS**

Less than 45 percent of students pass rigorous exam

SACRAMENTO—The State Board of Education (SBE) today released the results of the first California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE). Under current law, starting with the high school class of 2004, in addition to local district graduation requirements, students must pass the CAHSEE in order to get a high school diploma.

In March 2001, approximately 90 percent of ninth graders took the CAHSEE. Less than 45 percent of those ninth graders passed the exam and, more troubling, less than 25 percent of the Latino and African-American ninth graders passed the test. Students who did not pass will have multiple opportunities to take and pass the CAHSEE throughout their high school years.

“The results are sobering,” said State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI) Delaine Eastin. “The reality is that some of our schools are not adequately preparing all students with the coursework and material required to pass the CAHSEE. The data show that we have a great deal of work to do, especially with our low-performing schools.”

“Because the CAHSEE includes algebra, geometry, probability and statistics, we must acknowledge that it is the most rigorous high school exit exam in the nation,” State Board of Education President Reed Hastings said. “Any citizen can see just how rigorous our California standards and assessments are.”

Available on the <www.cde.ca.gov> Web site is a representative subset of the actual CAHSEE questions.

“The achievement gaps shown by the data are not acceptable. But we now have firm data that will allow us to focus our efforts to close the gap, including targeted instruction,” added Hastings.

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As part of the comprehensive reforms California is pursuing, significant steps are already underway to ensure that all students have an opportunity to pass the CAHSEE, including: standards-based professional development, incentives to attract qualified teachers into low-performing schools, and an accountability system that gives incentives to improve achievement among our lowest-performing students.

Initiatives already proposed by the Davis Administration and passed by the Legislature, as well as those proposed this year, “are absolutely necessary to bring high-quality instructional services and opportunities to all students,” said Hastings.

This is especially true for current proposals, he added, including algebra incentives, professional development for all reading and math teachers, incentives for teachers to instruct in low-performing schools and a proposal by State Senator Martha Escutia, D-Montebello, to add new resources and reconfigure all existing resources for low-performing schools.

As an additional safeguard, Governor Davis is sponsoring and State Superintendent Eastin is supporting legislation that would ensure that students would face consequences for passing the CAHSEE **only** when they have been provided every opportunity to pass the exam. Assembly Bill 1609 (Thomas M. Calderon, D-Montebello) would do the following:

- Limit pupils in grade 9 to taking the CAHSEE to the 2000-01 school year; beginning in 2001-02 school year, each pupil shall take the CAHSEE in grade 10 and will continue to have multiple chances to pass the exam;
- Require the SSPI to contract for an independent study, with the approval of the SBE, to examine whether the test development process and the implementation of standards-based instruction meet the required standards for a test of this nature; and
- Authorize the SBE to defer the date upon which each pupil completing grade 12 is required to successfully pass the CAHSEE as a condition of receiving a diploma of graduation to a date other than the 2003-04 school year.

Eastin and the SBE today also released a representative and significant sample of the test questions from the 2001 CAHSEE, as well as material from the American Institute of Research (AIR) on the development of the passing score recommendations from a panel of experts.

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The SBE took action today following a review of the results of the March 2001 administration of the CAHSEE after considering the recommendations of the panel of experts and Eastin.

The SBE adopted Eastin's recommendation to establish a passing score of 60 percent correct for English-Language Arts and 55 percent correct for Mathematics. The CAHSEE is based on California's English and mathematics content standards, generally regarded as the nation's most rigorous learning expectations for its K – 12 students.

"The panel of experts recommended a passing score higher than my adopted recommendation. I believe it is wiser to start at 55 percent and 60 percent passing scores, and move the bar up as we continue to improve the entire education system," says Eastin.

"I applaud Superintendent Eastin's analysis of the appropriate pass rate, given that we have one of the most challenging high school exit exams in the nation. Texas, for example, has not included Algebra, Statistics, or Probability in their exit exam for the last 10 years," says Hastings.

"Originally we had hoped to set an even more rigorous passing score, but we were unable to get Senate Bill 84 passed by the Legislature. Senate Bill 84 would have allowed the SBE to set the passing mark based upon a complete tenth grade census of students. Given the current situation, however, our best course was to set the passing score as we did with the intention to move it up to a 70 percent correct passing score for future classes of high school students," said Hastings.

"Given this information, we must focus much more attention on our lowest-performing schools and on our lowest-achieving children. That means insisting that every opportunity to learn this information must be afforded to every child," said Eastin.

"Keeping in mind our children will have multiple opportunities to pass this test, there is still much to be done in the coming years," she said.

The CAHSEE was signed into law in 1999 by Governor Davis as a way to assess whether high school students have mastered a set of standards-based skills before being awarded a diploma. The first test was given on a voluntary basis to the class of 2004, today's freshmen. The exam covered English-language arts and math.

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